

ANOTHER VIEW OF TREITSCHKE.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE present number of *The Open Court* contains an article on Treitschke which is written from the British standpoint and presents a distorted picture of the man. The editor has accepted the article not because he endorses the judgment of the author but because he does not want to suppress opinions contrary to his own. He does not wish, however, to begin a controversy on the subject, because he has not made a specialty of history and still less of German history as written by Professor Heinrich von Treitschke; but feels it his duty to point out some flaws in the statements of Miss M. Jourdain.

Treitschke was a man of conviction, and his conviction is that Prussia is the state which best realizes the humanitarian ideal. Prussia therefore, according to Treitschke, is the best-fitted instrument of God—of the world-spirit, of the principle of progress—to bring about the union of Germany and be the leader of the Teutonic nation so that the German people may assume the place they deserve to hold in the history of the world. This conviction was deeply rooted in Treitschke's soul, not on account of any inherited prejudice in favor of Prussia, but in spite of contrary traditions which he naturally acquired from his surroundings, his education and inheritance, and we must honor his independence of thought, whether we agree with him or not.

Treitschke was a native of Saxony, the son of a high Saxon officer, a lieutenant-general in the Saxon army. He came from a state whose citizens at this time hated Prussia most intensely. He saw the reason for Prussia's greatness; he admired the strength of her policy, her unflinching sense of duty, her love of justice even toward enemies and the tradition of her rulers in whom the spirit of Frederick the Great was still kept alive. In 1866 war broke out between Prussia and Austria, and his native country

Saxony allied herself with Austria; but he felt so intensely for Prussia that he became naturalized as a Prussian.

History was not merely a theoretical study to Treitschke; it was the teacher of mankind, and from the past he learned the meaning of the present. He became an interpreter of the significance of the present and like a prophet he was bent on deciphering the future. He was not merely a professor of history, he was a prophet; and in his study of historical facts he pointed out the dangers of the future, preaching in his lessons the duties of the present generation.

Treitschke was a patriotic Prussian and can be said to be a representative German historian only in his own interpretation of Prussia's rôle in the history of Germany. We must bear in mind that Germany was not established as an empire until 1871, when Treitschke was thirty-six years old, and at that time each German state had its own local conception of history, most of them being anti-Prussian. Treitschke's view was justified by Prussia's success and so other historical conceptions fell gradually into oblivion.

Treitschke was very active in German politics. He did not belong to a reactionary party, to the Junkers or any conservative group representing German Tories; he was a member of the National Liberal party and was elected into the Reichstag for Kreuznach-Simmern in 1871 where he kept his seat until 1883. If he emphasized his partisanship, he did it because he had chosen his party after a scrupulous inquiry into the situation. His adherence to his political program was a matter of conscience with him, and that is the reason why he was forceful in his demonstrations and convincing in his arguments.

Treitschke was a historian, and he was better able than others to decipher the handwriting on the wall. He had studied not only the history of Germany but was also familiar with France and England. Noting the expanse of Germany's industry and commerce, he foresaw that Germany would soon become a rival of Great Britain and prophesied the impending war. His voice of warning, however, was not heeded, and he by no means attained that fame in Germany with which he has been credited in England. There was no hatred of England in Germany at his time, but in England his writings found an echo and made him better known than he could ever have been at home. In him the word has once more been fulfilled that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country.

It is needless to say that there are millions and millions of

Germans who never heard of Treitschke nor of Bernhardi until these writers were boomed by the English press as the men who had made the war. But such is the efficiency of the English press that a distorted view of them is now spread over the whole English-speaking world and it is all but impossible to correct it. Treitschke is known to be the most painstaking historian with regard to the authorities on which his statements are based. At the same time he was a good writer and his descriptions are full of fascinating detail. He was not only a theoretical thinker, but also an earnest man with a practical bent of mind. To him the use of a study of history was its application to present politics, so he took part in the upbuilding of the German empire, and the duties of practical life were to him more important than academic work among his books. Now we must learn from English sources that he did not care for truth, but for the sake of his partisan standpoint was ready to distort the truth as a matter of principle.

It is hard (even for the young generation of Germany) to understand how difficult it must have been in the middle of the nineteenth century for a young Saxon nobleman to embrace the cause of Prussia solely because he had gained the conviction that the enemy of his country was in the right. I feel sure that this same man would have gone to England and have become a British subject of his Majesty Edward VII if he had become convinced that the policy of the Triple Entente was wise and righteous. He did not approve of the British policy of a world empire for he knew that world empire means war with every nation capable of becoming a rival. He is now represented as an advocate of German world dominion while in fact he has denounced the very idea of it as false and dangerous.

It has become fashionable to condemn Treitschke's views on the state as the *ne plus ultra* of barbarism, and the less people who are anti-German know of him the more positive they are in their condemnation. But the explanations of his philosophy current in modern English literature slightly distort his views, whereby they succeed in representing him as a man who absolutely disregards *right* in favor of his idea of the nature of the state as *might*.

Treitschke describes the origin of the state in his *Lectures on Politics*, §1, as follows:

"The state is the people legally united as an independent power. By 'people' we understand, briefly, a plural number of families permanently living together. When this is recognized it follows that the state dates from the very beginning and is necessary; that

it has existed as long as history and is as essential to humanity as language."

"It further follows from the nature of the state as sovereign power that it cannot recognize an arbiter above itself. . . . Since it is impossible to picture to oneself a higher judge above states, which are sovereign by their nature, the condition of war cannot be imagined away out of the world."

"... This truth remains: the essence of the state consists in this, that it can suffer no higher power above itself. How proud and truly worthy of a state was Gustavus Adolphus's declaration when he said: 'I recognize no one above me but God and the sword of the victor.'"

Treitschke recognizes the necessity of war among sovereign states under definite conditions: "Among the civilized peoples war remains the form of lawsuit by which the claims of states are enforced" by the victor. Concerning war Treitschke says:

"From the natural horror men have for the shedding of blood, from the size and quality of modern armies, it necessarily follows that wars must become fewer and shorter, for it is impossible to see how the burdens of a great war can be borne for any prolonged period under present conditions in the world. But it is a fallacy to infer from that that they could ever cease altogether. They cannot and should not cease, so long as the state is sovereign and confronts other sovereign states."

While war is abhorrent to Treitschke, he sees some good in it. He appreciates its good effects in history thus:

"War is also an element that unites nations, not one that only separates them; it does not only bring nations together as enemies; they also learn through it to know and respect one another in their particular idiosyncrasies."

War is a cure for many social ills. As Treitschke says: "War is the only remedy for ailing nations."

War teaches a wholesome lesson to the people in times when a nation is sicklied over with individualism, the belief in the sovereignty of the individual, the insignificance of every single man in contrast to the greatness of the state: "The moment the state calls: 'Myself and my existence are now at stake!' social self-seeking must fall back and every party hate be silent. The individual must forget his own ego and feel himself a member of the whole; he must recognize what a nothing his life is in comparison with the general welfare. In that very point lies the loftiness of war, that the small man disappears entirely before the great thought of the

state; the sacrifice of fellow countrymen for one another is nowhere so splendidly exhibited as in war. In such days the chaff is separated from the wheat."

This quotation alone suffices to prove that Treitschke is not an admirer or follower of Nietzsche.

Treitschke believes in the institution of compulsory military service as it exists in Prussia and regards a people's army like that of Prussia as "a school for the peculiarly manly virtues of the people, which so easily become lost in an age of profit and enjoyment."

He says on the same subject: "You must realize clearly how these new formations of the army affect the waging of war. On the whole the tendency of the system is a peaceful one. A whole nation in arms is dragged out of its social employments into a frivolous war with much more difficulty than a conscript army. Wars become fewer and shorter, but at the same time also bloodier. The desire to get home again will give a strong impulse forwards."

"Carlyle prophesied that the Prussian idea of universal liability of service would make the round of the world. Since in 1866 and 1870 the Prussian army-organization stood its trial so brilliantly, almost all the other great states of the continent have tried to imitate it."

While Treitschke has always been represented as neglecting the nature of right, he regards the state as an intrinsically moral institution. He says: "A power that treads all right underfoot must in the end itself perish." He criticizes Machiavelli for not recognizing right in politics, but he recognizes Machiavelli's significance in the history of politics as follows:

"It will ever remain Machiavelli's glory that he set the state upon its own feet and freed it in its morality from the church; and also, above all, that he declared clearly for the first time: 'The state is power.' But he does not get rid of the idea that morality is altogether ecclesiastical, and, while he drags the state away from the church, he drags it away from the moral law altogether."

"Machiavelli has entirely failed to see how this doctrine of mere power is self-contradictory even from his own standpoint. . . ."

Against Machiavelli's theory he insists that "even the state is everywhere subjected to the laws of its moral nature, which it may not infringe with impunity."

Treitschke does not believe in the ideal of an international world peace. He says: "All the pipe-of-peace-smokers in the world will not bring matters so far that the political powers will at

any time be of one mind, and if they are not the sword alone can decide between them."

While Treitschke recognizes that statesmen ought to be smart, that they ought to possess the wisdom of serpents, he believes that real statesmanship must follow the truth. He says:

"Of course journalistic phrase-mongers talk of great statesmen as of a disreputable class of men, as if lying was inseparable from diplomacy. The very opposite is the truth. The really great statesmen have always been distinguished by an immense openness. Frederick the Great declared before every one of his wars with the greatest precision what it was he wished to attain."

Treitschke has been accused of having taught the Germans to aim for world dominion, but nothing is farther from the truth than that. We must remember that the medieval notion of empire was that of a universal dominion. As the pope was to be the spiritual head of mankind—really of Christendom for Christianity would be the universal religion—so the emperor should be its secular head. This notion of a world dominion of the emperor, who at the same time happened to be king of Germany, is severely criticized by Treitschke.

Treitschke condemns the very idea of a world-state as impossible in itself, because every state, every nation organized as a civilized society, should remain sovereign. He says: "The idea of a world-state is odious; the ideal of one state containing all mankind is no ideal at all."

Hence the man who is commonly accused of having induced Germany to aspire for world dominion points out his conception of Germany's future thus:

"The ideal towards which we strive is an ordered company of nations, which lays down limitations of sovereignty in the way of voluntary treaties without doing away with that sovereignty."

I do not regard Treitschke either as infallible or as a saint; his theories are not flawless. Though of Slavic descent, he believes in the German race to such a degree as to preach anti-Semitism, and he is quite reactionary in opposing woman suffrage on the ground that it is not proper for woman to take a share in politics. But though we may differ from him on many points, no one who knows him can doubt his honesty or the earnestness of his conviction. There is one point which I would insist on and it is this: If we criticize a man let us not condemn him for opinions which he never held nor for tendencies which he never possessed.